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ABSTRACT

Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, the Quest project supports and investigates ongoing school improvement efforts in a four-state region (Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Virginia). Since 1996, Quest activities have included biannual conferences and summer symposia for school improvement teams, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and creation of a network of Quest schools. This report describes and assesses the second Scholars colloquium, held in July 1999 at Mountain Lake Resort, Virginia. The colloquium's primary purpose was for Quest staff and Scholars to collaborate in evaluating and writing about the project, ultimately contributing pieces to a book about the Quest network. The 12 Scholars in attendance included 6 principals, 3 teachers, 2 parents, and 1 speech pathologist. Activities during the 4 days of the colloquium are described in detail. These activities were intended to "prime the pump" of creativity and facilitate the collaborative writing process. The colloquium was evaluated in terms of the six Quest goals: connecting with colleagues, creating a learning community, connecting with concepts related to continuous school improvement, creating personal and shared meaning, and committing to continue learning with the Quest community and back home. All goals were achieved quite well. Appendices include the Quest framework of continuous improvement and evaluation forms. (Contains 20 references.) (SV)

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Evaluation of Quest Scholars Colloquium, July 1999

Caitlin Howley-Rowe

November 1999

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Caitlin Howley-Rowe
November, 1999

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AEL's mission is to link the knowledge from research with the wisdom from practice to improve teaching and learning. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. For these same four states, it operates both a Regional Technology in Education Consortium and the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education. In addition, it serves as the Region IV Comprehensive Center and operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region, AEL, Inc., staff designed the Quest project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through biannual conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This evaluation report describes and assesses the second Scholars colloquium, held July 12-15, 1999, at Mountain Lake Resort, Virginia. The primary purpose of this colloquium was for Quest staff and Scholars to collaborate in evaluating and writing about the project, ultimately contributing written pieces to a book about the Quest network.

Thirteen Scholars were to attend the 1999 Scholars colloquium; however, one was unable to participate due to other engagements. The 12 Scholars in attendance included six principals, three teachers, two parents, and one speech pathologist. All but one Scholar were women, and five were new Scholars. Several Scholars from the previous year were unable to participate for a variety of reasons, including illness, other professional development commitments, and travel. Four Quest staff attended, including the evaluator. In addition, an AEL writer participated to offer editorial assistance.

Data collection included participant observation, the writing of field notes, and administration of a final feedback form. Data were coded by theme and tabulated. The colloquium was evaluated in terms of how well the six Quest goals had been achieved. These goals are (1) to connect with colleagues, (2) to create a learning community, (3) to connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement, (4) to create personal and shared meaning, (5) to commit to continue learning with the Quest community, and (6) to commit to continue the Quest back home.

Analysis of data revealed that participants thought all of the goals had been met very well at the colloquium. Observational data corroborated feedback data in this respect. Some participants reported that they would have preferred more time for writing, and others noted that they wrote more effectively in solitude than in a group context.

The evaluator concluded that the colloquium had been very successful as all the goals had been achieved quite well. Recommendations included continuing to offer community-building experiences for Scholars, offering ongoing reminders about writing commitments, and providing more time for writing and more choice in location for writing activities at future colloquia.

INTRODUCTION

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region, AEL staff designed the Quest project (see Appendix A). Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through twice-yearly conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools.

In the summer of 1996, Quest staff at AEL began working with teams from school communities in three West Virginia county school districts to invigorate efforts for continuous school improvement, using a variety of techniques for gathering input from all those with a stake in their local schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998g). This first learning community, called Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE), consisted of school teams including students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Ultimately, this group wrote individual school visions and improvement plans, and co-authored (with AEL) *Creating Energy for School Improvement* (1997), a supplemental guide for those poised to write their own state-mandated school improvement plans.

Quest staff also were committed to creating learning communities devoted to exploring continuous school improvement across the AEL region of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Hence, staff scheduled a pilot Inquiry Into Improvement conference in April 1997 for selected region high schools. Schools were selected in several ways. Some schools were recommended for the Quest experience by central office staff or school administrators. Other schools were asked to join Quest because they had participated in previous AEL programs. Still other schools were invited because Quest staff believed they were primed for the kind of collaborative inquiries into school improvement that Quest was designed to provide.

In October 1997, in Roanoke, Virginia, another conference was held for designated high schools in the AEL region, this time with an explicit emphasis on forming and nurturing a network of schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998c). A similar conference was held in Nashville, Tennessee, for designated region elementary schools in November 1997 (Howley-Rowe, 1998a). In order to facilitate the development of a Quest school network and to continue to help invigorate continuous school improvement efforts within network schools, staff planned a sequence of events in 1998 following these initial conferences. Dissatisfied with the conventional and prescriptive connotation of the word conference, Quest staff chose to call these network meetings rallies. Thus, all events previously called conferences are now termed rallies.

The high school network met a second time on February 8-10, 1998, at the Pipestem State Park Resort in West Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1998d), following which the elementary school network participated in a rally on February 22-24, 1998, in Lexington, Kentucky (Howley-Rowe, 1998b). During the summer, 11 network members participated in the Quest Scholars Program, meeting at a colloquium in Charleston, West Virginia, on July 16-18, 1998, to collaborate with project staff in ongoing efforts to conceptualize, design, and research Quest (Howley-Rowe, 1998e).

Finally, in August, network members and other educators in AEL's region participated in a symposium on assessment of student work (Howley-Rowe, 1998f).

From the high school network rally in October 1997 to the August 1998 summer symposium, Quest staff hosted six network events. The Quest network contained an essentially stable membership, although there were differences in the number of school teams that attended each event and in the frequency that school teams attended gatherings. Project staff recently investigated this phenomenon, finding that administrative support for participation in the network was the factor reported to be most important to schools' initial and sustained involvement in Quest (Howley-Rowe, 1999c).

Beginning their second year of network activity, Quest staff invited the elementary and high school networks to attend a rally together on November 2-3, 1998, at the Glade Springs Resort, near Daniels, West Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1999a). Approximately half of the Quest Scholars met on November 1, 1998, to plan with project staff several rally activities. Scholars from the high school network met for three hours on February 14, 1999, prior to a high school network rally held on February 15-16 in Roanoke, Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1999c). A similar rally was held for elementary network members on February 22-23, 1999, in Lexington, Kentucky (Howley-Rowe, 1999b).

A second Scholars colloquium was convened from July 12-15, 1999, at Mountain Lake Resort, Virginia. The primary purpose of this colloquium was for Quest staff and Scholars to collaborate in evaluating and writing about the project, ultimately contributing written pieces to a book about the Quest network.

The primary audience for this report is Quest staff. It is intended to provide information to staff as they make decisions about future project events and the development of the network. In addition, this report will be part of an ongoing series of reports about Quest events (Howley-Rowe, 1998a-g, 1999a-c). This series will document the evolution of the Quest network and the process whereby staff strive to enable continuous school improvement. Consequently, this report may also prove useful to others interested in building networks or promoting school improvement over time.

One purpose of this report is to assess whether, and to what extent, Quest goals were met. The six major goals discussed in earlier reports are also analyzed here: (1) to connect with colleagues, (2) to create a learning community, (3) to connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement, (4) to create personal and shared meaning, (5) to commit to continue learning with the Quest community, and (6) to commit to continue the Quest back home. In addition, description and analysis of the colloquium provided in this report contribute to ongoing documentation of the Quest project and of the development of the Quest network.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were used for this evaluation component of the Quest project. During the colloquium, the evaluator engaged in participant observation (Becker & Geer, 1957; Emerson, 1983; Glazer, 1972; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1994), a method highly suited "for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12). Furthermore, consistent with the Quest paradigm, participant observation involves "a flexible, open-ended, opportunistic process and logic of inquiry through which what is studied constantly is subject to redefinition based on field experience and observation" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 23). This method "is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in their . . . experiences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 156), thereby enabling researchers to evaluate how an event or process appears and feels to participants. And, finally, participant observation places the evaluator squarely in the field, rather than in the office or on the phone, allowing for the collection of richer, more directly acquired data (Patton, 1980).

Denzin (1989) describes four variations in participant observation strategies: the complete participant, the participant as observer, the observer as participant, and the complete observer (pp. 162-65). The evaluator played a role more akin to the participant as observer, participating in several colloquium activities as appropriate but not concealing data collection.

In order to corroborate the theses generated by participant observation, the evaluator also conducted one other data collection and analysis activity. Using several data sources in order to corroborate theses is what Brewer and Hunter (1989) call "multimethod research." This approach posits that the strengths of each method will compensate for the weaknesses in others, ultimately providing a more complete account of that being studied. The other data collection method included the administration of a final feedback questionnaire. This instrument was administered at the end of the colloquium, and included questions about participants' reactions to the entire colloquium, and asked respondents to discuss how well and in what ways each of the six Quest goals had been met (see Appendix B).

Data analysis was conducted in two ways. First, feedback from questionnaires was coded by question and by theme. Second, field notes were analyzed by theme, with special attention paid to the ways in which such data corroborated or contradicted written feedback from participants.

COLLOQUIUM ACTIVITIES

Day One

Thirteen Scholars were to attend the 1999 Scholars colloquium; however, one was unable to participate due to other engagements. The 12 Scholars in attendance included six principals, three teachers, two parents, and one speech pathologist. All but one Scholar were women, and five were new Scholars. Several Scholars from the previous year were unable to participate for a variety of reasons, including illness, other professional development commitments, and travel. Four Quest staff attended, including the evaluator. In addition, an AEL writer was invited and participated. She attended to provide support and editing services to Scholars as they undertook their writing tasks.

The Scholars were to begin their work at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, July 12, 1999, in the Oak Room at the Mountain Lake Resort near Blacksburg, Virginia. However, many Scholars had not yet arrived by 5:30, so Quest staff decided that those who had arrived could either relax in their rooms or meet informally in the Oak Room until dinner at 6:30. In addition, one Quest staff member's flight was delayed, and the time of her arrival was unclear. Quest staff had planned a scavenger hunt on the resort grounds, as well, but this was not feasible given weather unexpected for July: The temperature was in the mid-40's, and it was rainy and foggy. The previous week temperatures had exceeded 100 degrees.

The meeting room was relatively small, on the lower floor of the stone hotel, and had only one window. Four tables were centered in the middle of the room in the form of an X; on each table were bags filled with manipulable toys and baskets of supplies, including pens, pencils, magic markers, paper, and Post-it notes. Around the perimeter of the room were two tables containing books, pamphlets, paper, and other supplies. On the walls were hung laminated posters with relevant quotes from education and organizational literature, and several easels were set up with butcher paper. The room had one stained glass casement window looking onto a brick wall.

Between 5:30 and 6:30, nearly all of the Scholars arrived, some chatting socially, others leaving to check into their rooms. By 6:20, all but two had arrived. Before adjourning for dinner together in the dining room, one of the facilitators requested that all participants briefly introduce themselves. Following this, all walked upstairs to share the evening meal. Conversation during dinner ranged from personal to professional. The facilitator whose flight had been delayed arrived, as did one other Scholar.

At 7:30, the group reconvened in the meeting room, with a greeting from one of the facilitators welcoming them to "sunny Virginia" amidst laughter. Quest staff distributed paper work necessary for travel reimbursement and stipends, and then asked the Scholars to participate in a "warm up" activity. Scholars were asked to make eye contact with another Scholar with whom they were not especially well acquainted, and then interview one another. Following this, each participant was to create a visual depiction of the most important things they had learned about their partner, which they subsequently presented to the entire group.

Participants engaged in the activity vigorously. The room filled with conversation during interviewing, and then quieted some as Scholars began drawing. Many joked about their lack of artistic ability, some giggling to themselves during their attempts.

At 8:15, the facilitators asked participants to finish their work and begin presenting their visual depictions. Each presentation was followed by a brief round of applause. The activity was completed by 8:36.

Next, the facilitators briefly described the agenda for the colloquium, noting that while activities and structures were planned to assist with writing, the schedule was not intended to be constricted and might be modified as needed. They pointed out junctures in the schedule during which sustained writing might take place, and noted that each of the components from the framework for continuous improvement were posted around the room on large pieces of butcher paper, on which related story ideas could be placed on Post-it note paper.

One of the facilitators announced that Quest staff had prepared several "starter activities to fuel each others' pumps of creativity." She added that they hoped the Scholars would let go of their senses of limitations, that the writing would be a collaborative effort, and that while Quest staff would facilitate the process, they also intended to take part in writing.

Next, the facilitators distributed copies of an outline they had prepared of the book they envisioned writing and briefly described their ideas for each chapter based upon a framework component. They also shared their hope that the book created in collaboration with the Scholars would be a resource book modeled in part on Senge's *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, with a variety of stories, themes, processes, and lists of resources. One facilitator remarked that the outline "is not the end . . . it is suggestive. Use it to jog your memory. [Your] stories do not necessarily have to be about your two years in Quest, but the point is to link schools with ideas that have worked over time."

Another facilitator said that Quest staff had "puzzled over how to share our vision [of the book]" with Scholars, and had decided to write a sample chapter. This was distributed to the participants: "These are a resource for you," added a facilitator.

Staff announced that participants would engage in an activity called Trek Mindscape the following morning to identify a shared vision of the product staff and Scholars would create. Participants were asked to reconvene following breakfast the next morning at 8:30

The Scholars then asked questions of Quest staff. One wondered whether such a collaborative venture had been undertaken before: "Not by us," staff replied. "But Quest in itself is unique," returned the Scholar. Another asked about the availability of laptop computers, which staff had brought for use by participants. Yet another expressed a hope that the role of professional development would be discussed in the book. The facilitators replied that while the framework did not address staff development directly, they thought it was quite important, and that it was "infused

in all the sections" of the book. Following a brief exchange about how this might be accomplished, the facilitators also noted their hope that the book might contain vignettes about each Quest school. A Scholar also expressed her thought that it would be important to write in a preface, for instance, "why we're an authority here . . . and why [a potential reader] should take the time to read this." Participants and staff appeared to agree.

The group adjourned at 9:08 p.m. As Scholars were readying to leave, the AEL writer distributed a poem as a source of linguistic inspiration.

Day Two

Following breakfast in the resort dining room at 7:30 a.m., the Scholars convened in the Oak Room at 8:30. The first activity Quest staff facilitated, Trek Mindscape, was the creation of a visual depiction on poster paper of the vision Scholars had for the product they were meeting to begin devising. "What do you imagine this thing we'll create together will look, feel like, do?" asked a facilitator, who then wrote Scholars' responses on the poster paper. Replies included, "a catalyst for others," "confirmation," "conflict," "provide encouragement . . . change is difficult," "an expansion . . . broader, deeper view of schools," "emergent . . . continuous ever-changing process . . . not a cookbook," and "a sampler." Quest staff and Scholars then briefly discussed their collective vision that the book they intended to write should provide a variety of stories, themes, and processes while also offering some guidance. One staff member summed up, "So it might be a cookbook sampler, but not a recipe." Another added, "I hear that this needs to be practical."

The discussion then turned to the book's audience. A facilitator read a description of the audience she thought closely resembled Quest's intended audience: "any member of the educational community." A parent added, "Let's not leave out students." "Would they realistically be an audience?" asked a principal. "If they were part of the team," replied another. One Scholar added that she could envision several of the student Quest participants using such a book "as part of their student leadership work."

A Scholar returned to the theme of samplers, noting that she hoped the resultant book would offer readers validation and reassurance that others had faced similar challenges along the path of continuous school improvement. Another said she hoped that stories included in the book would depict the struggles and challenges associated with school reform as normal components of the process. Contributing to this theme, a principal noted that, as in advertisements for diets, the "before and after" of school improvement were often depicted in educational publications, whereas the "between" was ignored. She then added several more components to the Trek Mindscape vision, including "cognitive dissonance" (although she pronounced this "dissidence"), "everyday people can do this," and "moving from cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty." She also said the opening from *Winnie the Pooh* was relevant to school change. In the passage, she explained, Christopher Robin is dragging Pooh by his feet down the stairs. As his head is bumping, Pooh thinks to himself that "there must be a better way to do this if only I could stop bumping." The Scholars responded collectively, "Oooo," and a Quest staff member said, "This may be our first quote [in the book]."

A parent then suggested that the book ought to reflect the participatory nature of the Quest project. She commented that she had been impressed that project staff not only "talked about participatory" work, but that every activity was designed to invite participation. She added that education included the imperative to "reflect, be critical, give people choices, different ways to look at things." The other parent agreed, "[You] need ownership of your own learning."

A facilitator said she was "struck by the extent to which we've spoken of the value of networking," the value of knowing that "you are not alone in the sea of change." A principal replied that "You sometimes feel that way when you're in your school."

Another principal referred to a passage from *The Wizard of Oz* in which the Good Witch reveals to Dorothy that she possessed the power within herself all along to return home. He elaborated, "As a leader, you really need to believe in yourself." Describing the first few weeks of inclusion at his school, he said he "slunk home" each evening, although "I had to believe we're doing the right thing." Hence, he said, "this book should encourage people when they are thinking, 'I can't get up and go to school to face what I've created.' This book should help remind people of the power within themselves." "The book becomes your network," added another Scholar. The principal continued, reflecting that the Video Journal's depiction of another professional development project designed by Quest staff, QUILT (Questioning and Understanding to Improve Learning and Teaching), was powerful because it illustrated "real people teaching real kids." Likewise, he argued, the Quest book "needs to represent diversity . . . to counter the argument, 'Oh, that won't work here because our kids aren't like that.'"

A facilitator reflected aloud, "I wonder how to bring it all, all the stories, back to a student? Could we do that here? Ground the whole notion of journeying together in what it means for kids?" A Scholar replied, "The stories are the seeing it." The facilitator added, "So don't be modest [when you write]."

Other topics included the use of real names or pseudonyms in the book; Scholars and staff decided tentatively to use real names for adults who agreed, and pseudonyms for students. The group also discussed the power of symbols, metaphors, and imagery in communicating. "We hope you make your schools come alive in the book. You're writing to convey that," explained one facilitator.

Quest staff then asked Scholars to continue the Trek Mindscape activity, elaborating the foundation or common ground shared by the group. Contributions included "our shared experiences in Quest," "and in schools," "the framework, network experience, the creed," "a shared philosophy of change," "what we share is we know it's us who needs to change," "need to accept the good and bad," "we are facing the 21st century . . . we need creative workers," "need to defend public education," "there needs to be a commitment to every child," and "need to maintain learner-centered focus and vocabulary."

The discussion meandered through some critiques of education in general; a facilitator soon asked the Scholars to redirect their attention to the activity, requesting that they next list the barriers

they might confront when writing the book. Scholars offered, "a lack of public support" and "media." The facilitator clarified that the discussion ought to focus upon barriers to producing the book, not to public education itself.

A parent contributed, "We've been talking about a paradigm shift. But I'm still hearing that we have to change the way parents think when what we mean is that we all need to change, to learn together. We don't need to sell education to parents." Another parent added, "We are hearing that the barrier is outsiders, but we don't want to be outsiders. Education is a closed system. Inclusion is token, and parents and students can tell the difference." To which a teacher replied, "I think it's endemic to out top-down administration. Teachers also feel it vis à vis administration." A Quest staff member rephrased, "So, a barrier is our audience not embracing our approach." A parent returned, "But we don't want to preach to the choir." In reply, a Scholar pointed out that "those reading [the book] will already have decided change is needed."

The facilitators then asked participants to discuss "how do we help the book get read?" A Scholar mentioned readability for the multiple audiences of the book as an issue. Another returned briefly to the theme of barriers to producing the book, mentioning marketing and time: "We won't write the book in these days, so there will be a time commitment outside these meetings."

Quest staff said that the next topic would be the first steps toward writing the book, but provided the group a break at 9:45 a.m. before undertaking this subject. The Scholars reconvened at 9:58 with a facilitator asking rhetorically following conversation during the break, "Are we going to set the format and structure [of the book] or just write and let it evolve. The answer is yes. [Collective laughter]." Another facilitator elaborated, "We don't want you to get too self-conscious about writing. We do have editors [at AEL]."

At 10:00, Quest staff requested that participants engage in an activity based upon a children's book called *The Important Book*. In this activity, Scholars returned to their notes from interviewing a partner the previous evening and spent approximately five minutes writing several sentences modeled on the book. Participants worked quietly with occasional laughter at side conversations or at their literary attempts. At 10:16, participants were asked to read their sentences aloud; each short presentation was followed by applause.

Next, Scholars asked about the absence of Scholars from the prior year, which Quest staff then explained. At 10:35, the facilitators asked participants to work with their interviewing partners in a new activity. Scholars were to choose a chapter heading, all of which were based on components of the Quest framework for continuous improvement. They were then to discuss and write on paper "the important things" about their chosen component. Teams were allotted 15 minutes to complete the activity.

Pairs worked with apparent diligence from 10:42 until 11:08, reading about their components from Quest notebooks, then discussing quietly what appeared most salient about each concept.

Participants next wrote their conclusions on yellow notepaper, which they were asked to tape to large poster papers titled with their particular framework component.

When pairs completed their work, the facilitators asked them to read their conclusions, while the remainder of the Scholars asked questions. This discussion was vigorous, with many questions raised. Although, as one facilitator put it, "The important thing about questions is that we won't answer them now." Participants appeared to speak freely and to discuss issues both practical and philosophical.

The group broke for lunch at 12:30. Conversation during the meal was relaxed, informal, and often personal; participants shared stories about their families and amusing incidents at their schools.

Reconvening at 1:30, the AEL writer offered several writing resources to the Scholars including books about writing, a top ten list of writing tips, and the Kentucky writing rubrics. A facilitator added that the writer was "on board to look at your work as a critical friend."

Next, the Scholars participated in a brief activity to become energized and were given their first writing assignment. Participants were to convene in groups of three to describe one Quest event, discussing everything about it except the agenda, including what participants had said, how they behaved, any memorable sounds, colors, or emotions. Following this, each Scholar was to write the story their trio had just shared.

The participants spread out in the hotel, some sitting on a patio, others returning to the meeting room. By 2:10, most had returned to the meeting room to write their stories. One Scholar reported not understanding the assignment; Quest staff spent several moments attempting to clarify the directions. Unable to completely overcome the Scholar's confusion, staff ultimately said simply, "Just write." Four participants wrote on laptop computers, while the others wrote longhand on yellow notepads, all with apparent concentration. A few Scholars asked for and received feedback from the facilitators or the writer.

At 2:43, as several people completed their writing, Quest staff introduced the next activity. Scholars were asked to choose one of nine selected books, read the marked passage, and write a brief review with a partner (who would have read the same selection) during the afternoon break. Following dinner at 6:00, participants were to reconvene at the house where Quest staff were staying during the retreat to discuss their reactions to the books. After some brief discussion, staff decided that participants need not write a review but be prepared to discuss their willingness to do so for the book. The writer distributed computer disks to those who requested them.

Staff expressed their hope that "you'll leave your writing with us, on disk, paper, printed." Most Scholars appeared to do so. By 2:56, most Scholars had completed their writing, given it to Quest staff, and left for their break. A few consulted with staff and the writer.

Following a relaxed and friendly group dinner, the Scholars convened at the staff house at 7:30 p.m. Chairs and sofas had been arranged in a large circle around the lit fireplace. A facilitator began by asking participants to "take a few minutes to reflect on your expectations and experiences" thus far at the retreat. Scholars responded with many comments. One praised the "thought-provoking discussions . . . we needed it to refocus on the framework." The AEL writer posed the following questions about networking, "Where does that appear in the framework? How much of that do you do when you're not together?" In reply, one Scholar quipped, "We all write a lot on the listserv," which comment received loud laughter because the listserv is underutilized by network members. He continued more seriously that networking for him meant that "if I face something difficult, I stop and think, 'I could call Dottie[1] or Evelyn.' It calms me down . . . to know they're out there." Another Scholar agreed. "It's a privilege to get together four times a year," said another. A parent contributed, "[There is] nowhere else parents would be privileged to sit down and talk about these things." "You are better able to solve other people's problems. Within a network, you can solve your own problems through others." One principal said simply, "The whole thing is beneficial."

Scholars continued to discuss the theme of networking. One noted, "Some of you in this room have really become my heros. I think, 'What would Dr. Baldwin do?'" He continued, noting a characteristic he associated with each of several other Scholars, describing how they peopled his mind during difficult moments at school. "It's almost a co-mentorship," one participant added.

A facilitator then asked participants to share "any thoughts about today, what was particularly helpful or not." "I'm always impressed with how you move us forward, and it works," said one. Another replied, "It will happen . . . little pieces will come together, it's not one person's job." "Revisiting the components helped me refocus," reported yet another. Revisiting the framework components "means so much more over time" to one Scholar.

Differently, one participant reported, "I didn't like today. I don't like to write." The facilitators responded, offering the Scholar several alternatives to writing: dictaphones, from which spoken stories could be transcribed, and telling stories to the AEL writer, who could then write them. They noted that "tomorrow you will have a lot of latitude for choice. We hope that you will feel individually productive."

At 7:53, Quest staff redirected the discussion, asking Scholars to provide reports on the book excerpts they had read during the afternoon break. This activity lasted well beyond the scheduled adjournment time of 9:00 p.m. Reports lasted longer than might have been anticipated, and the Scholars had several conversations concerning education issues that arose from the books described. Quest staff redirected participants to the task at hand several times.

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[1]All personal and school names used in this report are pseudonyms in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40. Quest staff acknowledged the late hour, adding that the Scholars could meet at 9:00 the following morning rather than the scheduled 8:30 beginning time.

Day Three

Convening at 9:00 a.m., the Scholars (minus one, who had to leave due to a relative's illness) began their third day with a brief overview of the day's structure. The facilitators explained that the group would spend the first hour or hour and a half thinking about the specifics of one chapter. By 10:00 or 10:30, Scholars were to choose writing assignments, reconvening in the afternoon to edit and check on one another's progress. Participants would be permitted to write wherever they chose. Boxed lunches would be made available so that Scholars could remain flexible. And following dinner, the participants were to reconvene at the Quest staff house.

Staff then spent approximately 30 minutes discussing the draft they had written of a chapter on the framework component of shared leadership. They noted that the format was similar to that of Senge's *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, containing school stories, descriptions of processes, and brief reviews of relevant resources, for instance. Staff called participants' attention to the way in which one story was told to reflect the chapter theme, adding that the story had other elements that could be given a different "spin" to reflect another framework component. They suggested that the Scholars determine before writing stories in which chapter they hoped to place them. Staff also pointed out incomplete stories in the chapter about their schools, requesting relevant participants to consider completing or elaborating upon them.

Staff had intended for pairs of Scholars to discuss what stories or pieces might fit into each chapter, but decided instead to do that work as a whole group. The facilitators read aloud their outline for each chapter, noting stories or themes about which Scholars might write. Scholars were also invited to propose stories they thought were pertinent, and many did so. Story ideas were to be written on Post-it notes, then placed on the large poster paper naming each chapter and framework component.

This process continued until approximately 10:30, and included a few discussions of relevant issues. A facilitator then asked, "Is there anyone here who feels they do not have a plateful?" which received laughter. "We want to let you get started," she continued. Staff again noted that laptop computers, computer disks, and printer were available should Scholars want them, and that they were free to write wherever they felt most comfortable. The facilitators also mentioned that they "hope[d] you will have completed 3-5 things [by the end of the retreat], and each of you will leave with a to-do list to take with you. So you will have a cluster of things done and a vision of things to do."

The group agreed that those who wanted to meet in the afternoon could convene at 1:30 in the meeting room to receive feedback, guidance, or other writing assignments. Scholars began to leave for their rooms, the patio, or other locations around the resort by 10:41. Several sought consultation with staff or the writer.

Some Scholars reconvened at 1:30 in the Oak Room with Quest staff, sharing descriptions of their writing thus far, and applauding one another's efforts. At 2:30, most returned to their writing.

The participants met at 6:30 p.m. for dinner, which lasted until 8:30 because, unlike previous meals, it was served rather than offered as a buffet. The Scholars appeared especially jovial during this meal, sharing very amusing stories of strategies for dealing with errant students amidst much laughter.

Finally, at 8:55 p.m., the group convened again at the Quest staff house to brainstorm possible titles for the book. As with dinner, the participants seemed quite relaxed and in good spirits. The Scholars offered many ideas.

At 9:45, Quest staff noted that they had planned an activity for that evening, but due to the late hour intended to facilitate it the following day instead. A facilitator then asked participants to continue thinking about how they might write vignettes depicting their schools and previewed the next day's activities. Scholars were to convene briefly at 9:00 a.m. in the Oak Room, after which they would again be allotted an extended block of time for writing. The retreat would adjourn by 3:00 p.m. at the latest, staff said. The group disbanded for the evening at 9:50.

Day Four

The final day of the 1999 Scholars colloquium began a bit later than expected after a leisurely group breakfast. Before the group began their work, one Scholar departed early with apparently little explanation. At 9:15 a.m., the facilitators led participants in a brief discussion of a revision of the Quest creed by two Scholars; Scholars made a few editing suggestions but ultimately decided the revision was adequate. The AEL writer agreed to incorporate their suggestions during the writing break.

Quest staff also announced tentative dates for the next rallies to be held in November, discussing their viability with the Scholars. The facilitators next requested that participants use the remainder of the morning to continue writing, making sure to check out of their rooms by 11:00 a.m. and meeting for lunch at 12:30. Afterwards, the group would meet for a final time to report their progress, celebrate the work accomplished, revisit the Trek Mindscape, and commit to further writing. The two parent Scholars and several others agreed to meet at noon to discuss writing a story about their efforts at parental involvement while engaged with Quest. Most participants departed at 9:37 for their rooms or other locations to continue writing. Five remained in the Oak Room to work.

At noon, seven Scholars were working in the meeting room, writing, editing, talking with the writer, or printing their completed pieces. Others were scattered throughout the hotel, talking in pairs or writing.

Following lunch, the Scholars reconvened at 1:38 p.m. The facilitators distributed manilla folders to participants for collection of their work. The Scholars spent about 20 minutes gathering

and organizing their written pieces, converting files, printing remaining stories, and completing work as needed.

At 2:00, Quest staff reviewed aloud the Trek Mindscape vision for the book that Scholars had created. They then asked, "What first steps have we taken?" Participants replied with descriptions of the pieces they had written. They were also asked to describe what pieces they were committed to write after the retreat. One Scholar prefaced her report with the comment, "This is much more of an undertaking than I thought it would be." The reports lasted until 2:45, with each participant reporting that they had completed between 3 and 8 written pieces and that they intended to write, or ask others at their schools to write, between approximately 5 and 25 further pieces. Staff transcribed each participant's intended work. Each report was followed by applause from the entire group as participants provided their completed work to Quest staff in the manilla folders. During the reports, the writer also completed the suggested edits of the Quest creed, which the group approved. Final editing would be completed by AEL, and large posters would be sent to Quest schools for display.

At 2:45, the facilitators noted the participants had not written vignettes describing their schools. One suggested that Scholars might complete these at the fall rallies. Quest staff then thanked the Scholars for their work and applauded their efforts; one suggested in return, "We need to give our facilitators a hand," which the group then did.

Quest staff next asked the Scholars to consider the obstacles they might face when attempting to complete their written work. Participants named time, school opening, resources, other people, competing projects and interests, and loss of enthusiasm as potential stumbling blocks. A project staff member said, "I want all of us to think about how to overcome them," then suggested strategies such as accelerating networking activities or using the Quest listserv more frequently to stay in touch and offer each other encouragement over time. Another staff member suggested that writing might be easier for Scholars away from their schools. Her suggestion led to the group decision to hold the fall network rallies in the same locale, Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, with two days intervening for Scholars to meet and continue writing together; the elementary rally would convene November 11-12, the Scholars from November 13-14, and the high school network from November 15-16.

The facilitators next suggested that the group and Quest staff focus on one chapter per month. After some brief discussion, the group determined that many of the pieces contributed thus far pertained to the chapter on strengthening the learning culture. Staff requested that any pieces concerning learning culture yet to be completed be submitted to them by July 31; project staff would then work in August on chapter text, coordinating the inclusion of relevant stories by the Scholars.

Staff asked if participants had any further questions. Briefly, they replied to queries about the Quest summer symposium to be held July 26-27, 1999, in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and about travel reimbursement. One Scholar asked if there would be any more discussion about book titles, to which a facilitator replied that no time remained for such discussions. Another facilitator suggested the group take the topic up at the fall meetings, adding, "Our deadline is in May to send [the book] to editing at AEL, so we don't need a title today."

At nearly 3:00, a Quest staff member asked participants if they would mind staying an extra five minutes. The group replied that they did not. Then the facilitator distributed small rocks made of phosphorescent material "as a symbol of having been together . . . a present and tangible reminder of our commitment."

Shortly after 3:00, the facilitators distributed blindfolds, explaining that they would conduct an activity learned of in Senge's *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*. Participants were asked to place their chairs in a large circle, put on the blindfolds, sit quietly for 30 seconds to reflect, and then share their feelings or reflections about the retreat aloud as they felt moved to do so. The facilitators added that if the activity was uncomfortable for anyone, they could feel free not to participate.

After a silence of several minutes, one facilitator spoke first, followed by five Scholars. One said, "One thing that's so special has been the positive attitude of everyone involved. This is a can-do group that is willing to tackle anything to help kids, and it is wonderful to be in a climate where everyone has that same spirit. It has been a thorough pleasure." Another offered, "I really appreciated the opportunity to speak from the heart about issues that are of serious concern about the future of our most precious belonging, children, and to speak to people with first names in a common language and get feedback that I know is honest and true and sincere, and know that people are struggling with me in common." "It has been a real joy for me to be a part of the Quest project over the last two years. My only regret is that it wasn't available 10 years ago when I first became a principal," said one participant. Ending in tears, yet another Scholar offered, "I think that having us all sitting here with these masks shows the level of trust that we have and the vulnerability. And I really have felt comfortable showing that side, and I thank each and every one of you for becoming my hero." Also emotionally said was, "I would just like to say to all of you that energy radiates outward from each of you into me, and that I feel honored to be in your company." The AEL writer wondered aloud whether she would be an adequate writer to portray the Scholars "very powerful" stories. After a silence of a few minutes, the other facilitator also offered a heartfelt comment.

The facilitators concluded the activity at approximately 3:20. Participants removed their masks, a few wiping tears from their eyes. In reference to one of the Scholar's comments, a Quest staff member noted, "Throughout this week, you have all made yourselves vulnerable. We thank you for your commitment and work."

The evaluation form was distributed; many Scholars asked if they could return them by mail as several had long drives home that evening. Staff agreed. Participants gathered their belongings, hugged goodbye, or shared a few moments of final conversation. The writer requested that all convene outside briefly for a group photograph. The colloquium adjourned following this.

FINDINGS

Achievement of Colloquium Goals

This section reports findings concerning the achievement of the six Quest goals at the 1999 Scholars colloquium. Data include participant observation field notes and questionnaire feedback. Ten of the 11 Scholars who attended the entire colloquium completed and returned the questionnaire. A reminder was sent to four Scholars who had not returned their questionnaires by October 1999; three were returned in response. A twelfth Scholar who left the colloquium following the first half day of activity due to family illness was not asked to complete the evaluation questionnaire.

Goal One: Connect with Colleagues

On the feedback form, all respondents indicated that the goal of connecting with colleagues had been very well achieved. "There is a close bond among Scholars—one that increases with each time together," wrote one respondent. Another wrote, "This was an excellent structure. I liked the fact that there were fewer than 20 people working together consistently," and yet another wrote, "The 'retreat' nature of the meeting really allowed one to connect with all."

In addition, during colloquium activities, Scholars offered praise for project inclusiveness inviting collegial connection: Quest staff not only "talked about participatory" work, but also "walked it" by actively soliciting collaboration on the conception and production of a Quest book.

Goal Two: Create a Learning Community

All respondents assessed the attainment of the goal of creating a learning community very highly. "[W]e had an opportunity to really look carefully at specific literature and discuss it in-depth. I think that we created a powerful learning community," wrote one Scholar. Another saw the Scholars learning community as the means to attend to issues she otherwise did not, writing, "Meeting and communing with parents has helped me hear a voice I haven't really been listening to." Similarly, another respondent wrote, "The group did seem focused . . . and open to hearing others' ideas and viewpoints . . . and willing to incorporate these views into the group thinking." "If I face something difficult, I stop and think, 'I could call Dottie or Evelyn.' It calms me down to know they're out there."

Likewise, during meeting activities Scholars noted the value of the Quest network and relationships developed as a result of participation. "Some of you in this room have really become my heros. I think, 'What would Dr. Baldwin do?'," said one Scholar, later describing the network as "a co-mentorship."

During the final activity with masks, several Scholars shared their sense of participating in a learning community. One praised "the positive attitude of everyone involved. This is a can-do group that is willing to tackle anything to help kids, and it is wonderful to be in a climate where

everyone has that same spirit." Another Scholar noted the trust that had developed amongst Scholars: "I think that having us all sitting here with these masks shows the level of trust that we have and the vulnerability. And I really have felt comfortable showing that side, and I thank each and every one of you for becoming my hero." That this was said amidst tears suggests that the sense of community and intellectual safety was indeed powerful to this Scholar.

Goal Three: Connect with Concepts Concerning Continuous School Improvement

All respondents reported that the goal of connecting with concepts concerning continuous school improvement had been well met. As one Scholar put it, "Clearly, the activities the day we brainstormed, reviewed, and presented on the concepts produced focus on continuous school improvement. The writing reinforced it." Another wrote, "[T]he Post-it note activities . . . helped get my thoughts going and made me see the 'wheel' [the Quest framework] overlap even more." Yet another Scholar reported, "The discussions were helpful in the clarification of the Quest framework." "Taking snippets of writing from various Scholars and talking about where they might fit [in the book] is a testimony to the 'connectiveness' of our project," wrote a fourth Scholar. One respondent praised the visibility of themes as supporting her connection with relevant concepts: "The topics for the book were continually visible so that we could refer to them and as ideas and other info presented itself we could more easily assess where they fit into the framework."

Other evidence suggesting connection with concepts included the vigorous discussions and diligent writing in which participants engaged. In addition, several Scholars indicated that activities concerning the Quest framework had been useful. One offered praise for the "thought-provoking discussions . . . we needed it to refocus on the framework." "Revisiting the components helped me refocus," said another. A third reported that the framework "means so much more over time."

Goal Four: Create Personal and Shared Meaning

All but one respondent replied to the questionnaire item concerning the degree to which the goal to create meaning had been met. Those who replied reported that the goal had been met very well. "All activities allowed us to grow personally and produced opportunities for shared meaning," reported one Scholar. "We really took the time to be reflective and to think carefully about what we meant when using the terminology of the framework. I view this as creating shared meaning," wrote another respondent. One Scholar felt that the colloquium had "encouraged and allowed [us] to express ourselves and to reconnect with the vision of the Scholars," while yet another reported, "Even when I was unsure of where we were going with a discussion, I ended in a better place." Meaning was created for one respondent through listening to other Scholars: "These very personal voices are always with me when I think about education and educators."

During the mask activity, one Scholar shared some of the meaning that she had created during the colloquium: "I really appreciated the opportunity to speak from the heart about issues that are of serious concern about the future of our most precious belonging, children, and to speak to people with first names in a common language and get feedback that I know is honest and true and

sincere, and know that people are struggling with me in common." Her comment suggests that learning in community is meaningful in itself, and that it is rendered even more so when the communal work concerns children.

Goal Five: Commit to Learning with this Community

All but one of the respondents replied to the query concerning the extent to which the goal to commit to learning with the Quest community had been achieved. Again, respondents reported that this goal had been very well met. Illustrative comments include: "I'll be with you as long as there is Quest," "This was one of the most valuable activities since joining the Quest project. I would be very disappointed not to have been a part of this," "The success of the experience of getting together makes it easy to remain committed to this effort," and "I never feel as professional and valued as when I work with this wonderfully unique group!"

Goal Six: Commit to Continue the Quest Back Home

All respondents reported that the goal of committing to continue the Quest back at their schools had been very well achieved. "We *will* meet out deadlines and continue the SMART initiative," wrote one Scholar. Another wrote, "I feel 'alive' with ideas after this work. Certainly the 'homework' will continue the effort at the school level." A third reported, "Being together and seeing how a group of strangers is able to get quality and meaningful interaction after building trust makes me believe that this can also be achieved back home." Another spoke of the incentive the group provided her: "Getting close to each other helps make the commitment to continue at home more imperative . . . You don't want to let anyone down!"

In addition, Scholars made note of and agreed to complete specific writing assignments when they returned to their schools.

However, two respondents noted that this goal was the most difficult to sustain due to competing priorities. One such Scholar wrote, "This is the only area that I have found problematic. Though I am using what I have learned from this experience in other schools, my sponsoring institution has not offered many opportunities to practice."

Evaluation of Colloquium Activities

Participants were asked on the questionnaire what had been the high point of the colloquium. Four respondents reported that the mask activity had been a high point. "I think we all know how committed one another is [sic] to school improvement, but truly the sensitivity, caring and love surfaced this afternoon," reported one Scholar.

Two other replies indicated that discussions held in Quest staff's lake house had been especially good. Other replies suggested that being part of the Scholars was in itself a high point. As one such respondent put it,

> "To me - being a part of the group of educators who struggle week by week and despite it all find many more positives in the process than negatives and who are focused on the best for students. The evening spent discussing possible titles for the book was not only fun but I felt very useful in solidifying the concept or purpose of the book. The contribution of each came from our thinking about the purpose of the book and how best to tell that in a few words. It was a process of distillation or fermentation. I'm sure a fine vintage will emerge."

Another Scholar thought that the high point had been "listening to the plans and dreams of all these educators."

Respondents were also asked to describe the low point of the colloquium. One reply contained two themes. Two Scholars replied that they had not experienced a low point. One respondent did not address this question. Three replies indicated that the cold weather had been a low point, and two that there had not been enough time allotted to accomplish all the writing. One Scholar cited her "anxiety of knowing how much needed to be done" as a low point. Another had been discouraged at "realizing how far we are from true learner-centered education. I am really missing the student participation in the Scholars process." And yet another found her resort room uncomfortable.

Scholars were then asked on the questionnaire to describe their feelings about their writing contributions. Four replies were quite positive. For instance, one respondent wrote, "I believe this meeting allowed/encouraged me to really "get started" with my ideas. I think I will be able to continue writing even more if the listserv or email prods me along." Another such respondent reported her "[e]xcitement. I feel privileged to be a part of such an exciting endeavor."

Six other replies were more ambivalent. One described herself as "uncertain, but willing to try." Three replies suggested that writing was difficult once back at home: "I wish I could do more," wrote one such participant, while another reported that she felt "OK, so far. I need to do more with more thought." One respondent would have preferred a different approach to writing: "It was a bit difficult for me to try to write as a team. I work better sitting alone reflecting then writing and sharing that and with criticism re-working it," wrote one.

Scholars were then asked to describe what colloquium activities had helped and hindered their writing efforts. Seven of the eight respondents offered answers with multiple themes. Three replies indicated that the pre-writing activities had been most helpful. A fourth respondent specified which pre-writing activities had been most useful to her: "I think that seeing the 1st draft of Ch. 5 helped me visualize the idea of the book more. Going over the basic outline of the book also got my thoughts going. I think perhaps the activity that helped me most was being together bouncing ideas off each other and sharing the success stories." Two respondents suggested that the location had been conducive to writing, one praising the mountainous location and another praising "be[ing] able to choose where we wanted to write." Other themes noted individually included collaboration, topic suggestions provided by the facilitators, solitude, music, time, and the AEL writer's explanations.

In terms of what had hindered writing, only three respondents offered critiques. One reported that, "I needed a laptop I am comfortable with." Two replied that they preferred to write in solitude. As one put it, "Again, as mentioned earlier, it was a bit difficult for me to get into the writing mode because this was being done as a joint activity with another member of my home Quest team. So the activities became irrelevant."

Asked how the colloquium could have been improved, four Scholars reported that it could not have been improved and one did not reply. Three respondents indicated that more time would have been helpful. As one put it, "Time, or lack of it, curtailed some of the original plans (or talk and *no* lack of it!) Yet the time allowed (within limits) for discussion and exchange of ideas contributed greatly to the sense of being a 'learning community.'" Another Scholar reported that working in the evening had been challenging, but also wrote that, "On the other hand I feel that being together at these times contributed to a much more intimate and meaningful experience." A final reply indicated that juice or soda could have been made available for those not drinking coffee or tea.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Conclusions are made based upon data collected.

The goal of connecting with colleagues appears to have been very well achieved at the Scholars colloquium. Connections were both professional and personal, and built upon previous collective experiences in the Quest network.

Also very well achieved was the goal of creating a learning community. Participants created together, along with the facilitators, an intellectually safe atmosphere in which to work. Moreover, Scholars felt a deep sense of emotional connection to each other through the learning community, their shared visions, and shared work.

Similarly, the goal of connecting with concepts related to continuous school improvement was very well met during the colloquium. Various activities enabled such connection, as did review of the framework. Writing additionally helped support connection with content.

The creation of personal and shared meaning was a goal well achieved. Participants were given time to reflect, write, and work together, activities which facilitated the generation of meaning.

The goal of committing to the Quest learning community was very well met at the colloquium. Participants felt devoted to their network colleagues and their collective project.

However, the goal of committing to continue the Quest back home was somewhat less well achieved, although most participants were energized and enthusiastic about returning to their schools. For two Scholars, sustaining such commitment upon their return was difficult. Competing priorities and lack of opportunities to act on Quest ideas were important barriers to commitment.

The mask activity was among the most successful at the colloquium. Participants found it rewarding and meaningful.

A few Scholars could have used more time to write, and several others might have had more success writing in solitude rather than in a group context. One Scholar's writing was hindered by using a computer with which she was not comfortable.

While some participants were excited about their writing thus far and their future writing commitments, others had wanted to accomplish more or felt somewhat ambivalent about their efforts.

Many colloquium activities helped Scholars begin writing. These included group discussions, sharing stories, and reading drafts.

Some Scholars could have benefitted from having more time to write. But overall, most Scholars found the colloquium to need little improvement.

Recommendations

Should Quest staff convene another Scholars colloquium, they might want to consider the following recommendations.

First, project staff should continue to provide experiences to Scholars that enable professional and personal connection between participants and ideas. All Scholars find such opportunities meaningful and useful.

Quest staff might also consider offering the Scholars bimonthly reminders and offers of feedback and encouragement during the ongoing writing process. Some participants would likely find such contact helpful as they struggle to find time to write while back at school.

If another colloquium is held, project staff might want to consider scheduling more time for writing activities and greater opportunities for Scholars to choose locations in which to write. Several participants preferred working on their narratives in solitude.

On the other hand, staff will want to balance increased time for writing with pre-writing activities that enable Scholars to approach writing with confidence.

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APPENDIXES

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Appendix A:

Quest Brochure and Framework of Continuous Improvement

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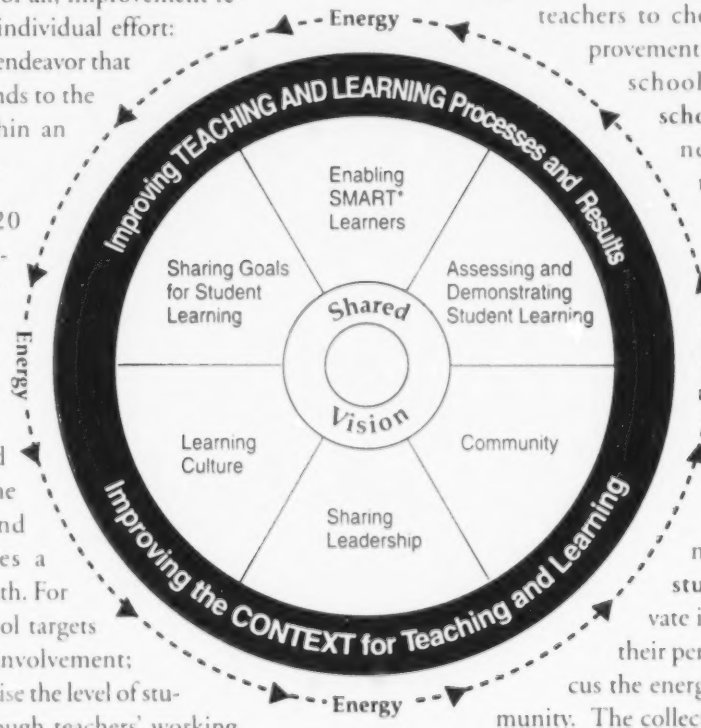
Quest for Quality Learning Communities
A Program for Continuous School Improvement

School improvement is challenging work; to be effective, it must be continuous. Improvement is not a single act or program; it is a process of always wanting to learn more about how better to help **all** students achieve at higher levels. Improvement is visionary; it involves risk-taking, uncertainty, and a rejection of "doing what we've always done." Most of all, improvement requires more than individual effort: it is a collaborative endeavor that engages and responds to the diverse voices within an entire community.

Teams from 20 schools in a four-state region now collaborate with staff from the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) to study and learn together in the Quest project, and each school takes a slightly different path. For example, one school targets increased parent involvement; another hopes to raise the level of student thinking through teachers' working together and coaching one another; a high school improves teaching by listening to what students say about how they learn best; other schools focus on specific curriculum areas such as writing or science education.

The Quest framework unifies their thinking about school improvement. These **core values** offer a blueprint for continuous progress: ongoing questioning of practice, high expectations for all, individual responsibility for better performance, collegial sharing and support, and thoughtful reflection on practice.



Stemming from these values is a clearly defined **vision** of student excellence that is shared by all members of the school community. A strong **learning culture** encourages both students and teachers to choose continuous improvement as a way of life in their school. Members of the **school community** connect to one another through a shared commitment to improved learning conditions for all. **Shared leadership** encourages and enables everyone to assume responsibility for making a positive impact on the school community. **Shared goals for student learning** motivate individuals to improve their performance and help focus the energies of the entire community. The collection, analysis, and **use of student assessment data** sustains continuous improvement, providing a measure of the effectiveness of the community's efforts. SMART learners are Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, and Thoughtful. Fully equipped to become lifelong learners, they are ready for life and work in the 21st century. In short, continuous improvement spawns the **energy** and excitement necessary to transform a collection of individuals into a true learning community.

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Goals of the Quest Project

1. ***Connect* with colleagues.** By serving on a Quest leadership team, participants connect with others on their school team, forming bonds that enhance working relationships. In addition, Quest teams connect with teams from other schools, districts, and states, allowing everyone to learn from others' experiences. A listserv, inquiry@ael.org, facilitates connections across the network.

2. ***Create* a learning community.** Teams become part of the Quest network learning community with the expectation of recreating this experience in their own community.

3. ***Connect* with concepts and stories related to continuous school improvement.** At Quest rallies, the Quest framework is a source of study, dialogue, and sharing among teams.

4. ***Create* personal and shared meaning.** The Quest network places a high value on processes such as reflection and dialogue, which lead to deeper understandings of continuous improvement.

5. ***Commit* to continue learning with this community.** Quest schools have made a three-year commitment to study and learn together, with a focus on improving student achievement.

What is a learning community? "Learning communities are essentially communities of inquirers . . . sustained by a continued commitment to share this journey of exploration with one another on matters people care deeply about" (Ryan, 1995).

Peter Senge et al. (1994) write that a learning organization "is a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, . . . and where people are continually learning how to learn together."

6. ***Commit* to continue the Quest back home.** The "rubber hits the road" at schools, not at Quest events. AEL helps school teams take their learnings home and apply them for the benefit of students. Site visits, called Co-Ventures in Learning, provide opportunities for AEL staff to visit each school, in order to better understand the context of that school's efforts, and tailor assistance to the school's needs.

The Quest project hopes to achieve results at three different levels:

- For individuals, sharing leadership on a Quest team leads to more reflective practice and renewed understanding of the concepts that support continuous improvement.
- For schools, Quest will provide motivation and support for ongoing and/or new school-based initiatives to improve teaching and learning.
- For the Quest network of schools, our collaborative learning and research will yield stories, insights, processes, and products—all of which will be helpful to the broader educational community.

References

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Appendix B:

Feedback Questionnaire

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Quest Scholars Colloquium
July 12-15, 1999
Mountain Lake, VA

Final Evaluation Form

As always, we are interested in your experience with the Quest project. Please take a few moments to answer the following questions. Your answers will remain anonymous and confidential, so feel free to be candid. Thank you!

1. Please briefly describe 1) how well and 2) in what ways each of the six Quest goals was or was not met during this colloquium.

   A. To connect with colleagues

   B. To create a learning community

   C. To connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement, particularly the Quest framework

   D. To create personal and shared meaning

   E. To commit to continue learning with this community

   F. To commit to continue the Quest back home

Please turn over to complete.

2. The high point of this colloquium was . . .

3. The low point of this colloquium was . . .

4. How do you feel about your writing contribution to Quest?

5. What colloquium structures or activities helped you write? What did not help you write?

6. How could this colloquium have been improved?

Thank you!

Appendix C:

Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

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Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

_____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
_____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
_____ evaluation contract
X evaluation report
_____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor		The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1	Stakeholder Identification	X			
U2	Evaluator Credibility	X			
U3	Information Scope and Selection	X			
U4	Values Identification	X			
U5	Report Clarity	X			
U6	Report Timeliness and Dissemination	X			
U7	Evaluation Impact	X			
F1	Practical Procedures	X			
F2	Political Viability			X	
F3	Cost Effectiveness	X			
P1	Service Orientation	X			
P2	Formal Agreements	X			
P3	Rights of Human Subjects	X			
P4	Human Interactions	X			
P5	Complete and Fair Assessment	X			
P6	Disclosure of Findings	X			
P7	Conflict of Interest	X			
P8	Fiscal Responsibility	X			
A1	Program Documentation	X			
A2	Context Analysis	X			
A3	Described Purposes and Procedures	X			
A4	Defensible Information Sources	X			
A5	Valid Information	X			
A6	Reliable Information	X			
A7	Systematic Information	X			
A8	Analysis of Quantitative Information			X	
A9	Analysis of Qualitative Information	X			
A10	Justified Conclusions	X			
A11	Impartial Reporting	X			
A12	Metaevaluation	X			

Name Caitlin Howley-Rowe Date: 11/23/99

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(e.g., author of document, evaluation team leader, external auditor, internal auditor)

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